

Autobiography

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1902

1 HIS LIFE AND WORK

1.1 CHAPTER 11

GROWING SUCCESS

WORK AT WHITBY, SHEFFIELD, AND BOLTON

MEETING MY FUTURE WIFE

ROMAN CATHOLIC RIOTS

ONE Saturday morning Mr. Booth sent for me and asked me if I had quite settled to my new work, and if I had made up my mind to stick to it. I said, "Yes, certainly, I have fixed upon this as my life work." "Very well," said Mr. Booth, "we think of sending you to Whitby. Are you willing to go?" I said, "Yes, sir." "Can you go today?" I said "Yes, sir;" and very soon I was at King's Cross and on my way. I had been given a ticket for Whitby, which had been bought by Mr. Booth's instructions, and the address of the missioner at that town, Elijah Cadman, afterwards Commissioner Cadman; but I had no money. This was my first long railway journey. When we once started I thought we should never stop. I had never traveled at such a rate before, and I had no idea the world was so large. I left King's Cross at three and got to York at eight, where I had to change. I discovered that there was no train for Whitby until five o'clock in the morning. I was cold and hungry, and I had nothing to do but wait. I had nine hours of that, and I spent the time in conversation with the railway porters and preaching the gospel to them. I walked up and down the platform, and once or twice I found a group of people in a public waiting-room and I had a chat with them about the Christ I had found, and of whom I was ever delighted to speak.

I reached Whitby at nine o'clock on Sunday morning. Nobody came to meet me, but I found my way to Mr. Cadman's house at 16 Gray Street. He greeted me with the words: "I have been up nearly all night waiting for you." I replied that since three o'clock on the previous afternoon I had been trying to get to him. After a hurried breakfast, I went out with Mr. Cadman and took part in

six meetings that day, three outdoor and three in-door meetings. The indoor meetings were held in St. Hilda's Hall.

I was now cut off from my first surroundings. I had to stand on my own legs, and I was made to feel that I must launch out for myself. I developed an older feeling and a greater independence of spirit. I did more speaking in the meetings than I had done in London. My singing was always a great attraction, but especially in Whitby among the fishermen. I became a great favorite in the town, and much good was done. Some of the most prominent and most useful local preachers in Whitby at the present day were brought to God under my ministry in the town. Not a few of the converts were rough people, very sadly in need of instruction in Christian ethics. I remember one peculiar case well. A man who had been a drunkard and a fighter was converted. Soon afterwards he was met by one of his old chums from whom he had borrowed a sovereign.

"I say, Jack," said the lender, "I hear you have got converted."

"Yes, I have, and joined the Church."

"Ah well, do you remember some time ago I lent you a sovereign?"

"Yes, I remember."

"Well, I shall expect you to pay it back. When people get religious, we expect them to do what is right."

"Oh," said Jack, "the Lord has pardoned all my sins, and that is one of them."

We had to put Jack right, and to tell him plainly that conversion meant restitution as well as amendment. The jailer when he was converted washed the stripes of the disciples whom he had beaten the same hour of the night, and Zacchaeus when he was brought to God made a fourfold restitution to those whom he had defrauded. And we persuaded Jack to do the right thing.

Among my converts at Whitby was a Miss Pennock, whom I afterwards became engaged to, and who is now my wife. As soon as Mr. Cadman knew that I was sweethearting, he communicated with Mr. Booth, and I was removed from the town.

The scenes of my next labors were Bradford, London, and Sheffield. I never preach in Sheffield now without a dozen or more people telling me that it was through my ministry in their town over twenty years ago that they gave themselves to Christ. It was in Sheffield too, that my first salary was paid to me, eighteen shillings a week. Fifteen of these went for board and lodging, so that I had three shillings a week for clothes, books, and anything I wanted for the improvement of my mental powers. My shillings per week did not go far when I had to visit the sick and the needy.

I spent six happy and fruitful months at Bolton. My fellow-workers, with whom I lived, were Mr. and Mrs. Corbridge, who treated me like a son. Mr. Corbridge was a very able man, a deep student of scripture. Mrs. Corbridge was an educated and refined lady, and a noble helpmate to her husband mission work. While staying with Mr. and Mrs. Corbridge, I laid the true foundations of all the educational equipment that I ever possessed. Upon that corner-stone I have been striving to build ever since. I owe more to Mr. and Mrs. Corbridge than to any other person in the Salvation Army or the Christian Mission.

The out-door services at Bolton were held in the Market Square on the steps of the Town Hall, where from two to three thousand people gathered to hear addresses by Mr. and Mrs. Corbridge and myself.

We had some difficulties with the Roman Catholics. Several of them were converted, and two young women brought their beads and rosary to Mrs. Corbridge and gave them up. This roused the anger of other Roman Catholics in the town and of the priests. One night Mr. Corbridge was not feeling well and stayed at home, Mrs. Corbridge remaining to nurse him. So I had to conduct the open-air service in the Market Square alone. The crowd was larger than I had ever seen it before. My workers rallied round me and I was provided with a chair. As the service proceeded the crowd grew. Until the benediction was pronounced everything had gone on in peace and quietness, but the moment the benediction was said the crowd began to sway menacingly. My band of workers and myself were in the center. The swaying grew more powerful and the people more excited. Then they set up one of those wild Irish Catholic yells and closed in upon us. My workers gathered round me for my protection. One ferocious woman in the crowd took off her clog and struck at me with the heel. But just as she was driving the blow home, her companion came between me and the heel and was felled to the ground. There were a few policemen near the spot, and when they heard the yelling and perceived what it meant they worked their way into the crowd and came to my rescue. I was pushed into the nearest shop—a drug store. One of the policemen came with me and got me out through the back door of the premises. We climbed over three or four walls and eventually reached a side street which led to quite another part of the town, and so reached home in safety. There is no doubt that if the mob could have got at me that night, my life would have been ended there and then. The news of the riot had already reached Mr. and Mrs. Corbridge, and their anxiety about my safety had been painful. They were very glad, indeed, to see me safe and sound in every limb.

On the following morning, Mr. Corbridge and I went to see some of the leading townsmen who were in sympathy with our work, and asked their counsel. Together we all called upon the Mayor, stated our case to him, told him that we thought this disturbance had arisen because of the conversion of some Roman Catholics, and that the opposition plainly came from an Irish and Catholic mob; and asked him what he advised us to do—whether to stop our work or to go on. He said: "By all means go on. You are not fighting your own battle merely. You are fighting ours as well. You have as much right to the square as the priests." And so that night we again held our open-air meeting in the Market Square. Mr. Corbridge had recovered and his wife came with us. The crowd was bigger than ever, and, as on the night before, there was the most perfect quietness and good order until the benediction was pronounced. Then the swaying and yelling began. But in the crowd there were sufficient policemen in uniform or in plain clothes to form almost a chain round us, and, under the escort of this force, we were marched off to our home at No.4 Birmingham Street. The mob followed us all the way, yelling like furies, and when we were safe in our home a number of policemen were put on duty to watch the house until all was quiet.

The riots were, of course, the talk of the whole town, but the feeling and sympathy of all respectable citizens were all on our side. The local papers took the subject up and championed the cause of free speech. When the powers behind the scenes realized that their wrath was going to be unavailing, the tumults subsided as suddenly as they had arisen, and there was never another voice or movement against our work in the Market Square. These commotions brought us many friends and sympathizers that we should never have known of, and, instead of hindering our work, greatly helped us. We grew and flourished exceedingly, and the Lord daily added to the church such as should be saved.